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# The Sullivan Principles

## A Code of Conduct for Corporations and a Social Investing Benchmark



By William Donovan

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The Sullivan Principles are a code of conduct created in the mid-1970s for corporations doing business in South Africa. They were conceived by the Rev. Leon Sullivan, a Philadelphia minister, activist for equal employment among African-Americans and a member of the board of directors of General Motors Corp.

In the 1970s South Africa was run by the **Afrikaner National Party**, which governed by a policy of apartheid or “apartness” between whites and blacks. Its **policies** limited opportunities for blacks in South Africa and caused most of them to live in poverty.

General Motors was the largest American employer in South Africa and after joining GM's board, Sullivan took an interest in the corporation's operations there. He used his position to launch an international effort to end discrimination against blacks in the workplace in South Africa and created the Sullivan Principles as the framework.

The Principles became a tool for anti-apartheid activists to take to corporations operating in South Africa. They became part of broad pressure, including a refusal of cities and states to purchase goods from companies with South African operations and the divestiture of shares by stockholders in those companies, which ultimately led to the end of apartheid laws.

In the preamble to the Principles,

Sullivan wrote:

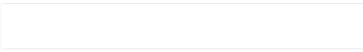
“The objectives of the Global Sullivan Principles are to support economic, social and political justice by companies where they do business; to support human rights and to encourage equal opportunity at all levels of employment, including racial and gender diversity on decision making committees and boards; to train and advance disadvantaged workers for technical, supervisory and management opportunities; and to assist with greater tolerance and understanding among peoples; thereby, helping to improve the quality of life for communities, workers and children with dignity and equality.”

Ads

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Companies that sign on to the Sullivan Principles pledge to do the following:

- Express their support for universal



whom they do business.

- Promote equal opportunity for their employees at all levels of their company with respect to issues such as color, race, gender, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs.

Also they would not operate with worker treatment that exploits children, includes physical punishment, abuses females, imposes involuntary servitude or incorporates other forms of abuse.

- Respect their employees' voluntary freedom of association.
- Compensate their employees enough to enable them to meet their basic needs and provide the opportunity to improve their skill and capability in order to raise their social and economic opportunities.
- Provide a safe and healthy workplace, protect human health and the environment and promote sustainable development.
- Promote fair competition including respect for intellectual and other property rights and not offer, pay or accept bribes.
- Work with governments and communities in which they do business to improve the quality of life in those communities, including their educational, cultural, economic and social well-being. They would also seek to provide training and opportunities for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Promote the application of the Principles by those with whom the company does business.

